

August A. Busch, Jr. Memorial Wetlands at Four Rivers Conservation Area Idea Gathering Stage Public Input Summary



Four Rivers Conservation Area

Missouri Department of Conservation
July 2015



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- The Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC) is seeking public input as we develop and revise conservation area management plans.
- The August A. Busch, Jr. Memorial Wetlands at Four Rivers Conservation Area is a 13,929 acre conservation area. It is comprised largely of wetlands with several large tracks of bottomland forest in Vernon and Bates Counties, northeast of Nevada. It is one of nearly 1,000 conservation areas owned or managed by the Missouri Department of Conservation. Conservation areas support the Department's mission by offering places to restore and conserve fish, forest and wildlife resources, and providing opportunity for all citizens to use, enjoy and learn about these resources. Conservation areas are different from state or local parks that may place a greater emphasis on team sports, recreational activities or social gatherings.
- MDC conducted a public involvement idea gathering phase (May 1-June 15, 2015) to gather input as staff begins to develop a 10-year management plan for Four Rivers Conservation Area.
- During this time period, we heard 43 comments from 39 respondents.
- Twenty-seven attendees participated in the Four Rivers Conservation Area Open House June 9, 2015.
- Common themes heard during this idea gathering stage included suggestions to develop a pumping system for Units 3 and 4, suggestions to open boat ramp year round and/or provide some way for archery deer hunters to access Horton Bottoms Natural Area, opposition to Quick Draw method, concern with amount of crops in refuge area, and appreciation for open (walk-in) waterfowl hunting on area and for area staff.
- The Four Rivers Conservation Area planning team will take comments into consideration as they draft a 10-year area management plan. The draft plan will be available online (likely fall 2015) for a two-month-long comment period at mdc.mo.gov/areaplans.

INTRODUCTION

Public Comment on Conservation Area Management Plans

The Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC) wants to know what Missourians think about its nearly 1,000 conservation areas around the state. MDC is in the multi-year process of updating management plans for conservation areas and invites public comments. To preview draft management plans and share comments online, visit mdc.mo.gov/areaplans.

MDC conservation areas cover almost 1 million public acres for the purpose of restoring and conserving forest, fish and wildlife resources, and for providing opportunities for all citizens to use, enjoy and learn about these resources. Most Missourians are within a 30-minute drive of an MDC conservation area.

Missourians care about conservation and use conservation areas for many different reasons. These areas help people discover nature through various activities, and help make Missouri a great place to hunt, fish and enjoy other outdoor activities. We want to know how conservation areas are important to Missourians. Encouraging public comments on Conservation Area Management Plans is part of MDC's ongoing efforts of working for and with Missourians to sustain healthy forests, fish and wildlife.

Conservation Area Management Plans focus on natural resource management and public use on conservation areas. The plans do not address regulations on hunting, fishing and other area uses, which are set by the Conservation Commission and enforced under the Wildlife Code of Missouri. MDC will consider all ideas received and will work to balance the issues and interests identified with the responsibility of managing areas for the present and future benefits to forest, fish, wildlife, and people. Decisions on which ideas to incorporate into area plans and on how to best incorporate them will be based on the property's purpose, its physical and biological conditions and capabilities, the best roles of the property in its local, regional and statewide context, and on the professional expertise of MDC staff.

Questions? Please contact MDC Public Involvement Coordinator Amy Buechler at 573-522-4115 x3252, or amy.buechler@mdc.mo.gov.

August A Busch, Jr. Memorial Wetlands at Four Rivers Conservation Area

The 13,929 acre area is largely wetlands with several large tracts of bottomland forest. It has over 21 miles of stream frontage and a large natural area.

The initial purchase of nearly 4,500 acres for the area occurred in 1982. A large-scale construction project completed in 1996 restored over 2,000 acres of this area (Units 1 and 2) to productive, manageable wetlands. Developments include a pump station, a water storage reservoir, and a system of levees and water control structures that allow control of water levels in 14 separate marshes.

In 1998, an additional 7,036 acres (Unit 3 and 4) were added to the area through a cooperative partnership between the Missouri Department of Conservation, the Natural Resources Conservation Service, Ducks Unlimited, the North American Wetland Conservation Council, and the Busch family. In 1999, the area was renamed the August A. Busch, Jr. Memorial Wetlands at Four Rivers to honor the former Conservation Department Commissioner and a man who cherished wetlands and waterfowl. This new addition was developed into three pools in Unit 3 and six pools in Unit 4 to include 3,200 total acres of wetlands in 2000 and 2001.

The area is primarily managed for wetland species using a variety of moist-soil management techniques, along with some agricultural crops. The managed waterfowl hunting program, along with 'open hunting' units provides waterfowl hunting opportunity to several thousand hunters annually.

Public Involvement

The idea gathering phase for development of the Four Rivers Conservation Area Management Plan ran from May 1-June 15, 2015. The objective of this phase was to inform stakeholders about the area planning process and ask them to share their ideas. To communicate about this comment period, staff:

- Developed flyers about Four Rivers Conservation Area idea gathering phase and posted at regional MDC and NRCS offices and local businesses.
- Online comment form available at mdc.mo.gov/areaplans.
- News release sent to local media outlets and posted on Missouri Department of Conservation Facebook page and Twitter feed.
- Sent announcement to area plan email list (4,000+ recipients).
- Personal visits, mail, and email to neighboring landowners, NGOs and local government offices.
- Four Rivers Conservation Area Open House June 9, 2015.

Next steps

The area planning team will take comments into consideration as they draft a 10-year management plan for Four Rivers Conservation Area. The draft area management plan will be available online (likely fall 2015) for a two-month-long comment period at mdc.mo.gov/areaplans. After that comment period, the plan will be finalized, and the final plan posted online.

DEMOGRAPHIC SUMMARY OF RESPONDENTS

Who responded?

From May 1-June 15, 2015, we received 43 comments from 39 respondents for the Four Rivers Conservation Area Idea Gathering Stage.

Table 1. Total number of respondents commenting during the idea gathering phase by respondent category.

Organization Type	Respondents
Individual citizens (no affiliation listed)	34
Private duck club (Riverside Duck Club; private duck club)	2
Non-governmental Organizations (Ducks Unlimited)	2
Government (State Representative)	1
TOTAL	39

How they responded

Table 2. Total number of each response type received.

Response Type	Comments
Web Comment Form	27
Hard Copy Comment Form	5
Open House Comment	11
TOTAL	43

Where respondents are from

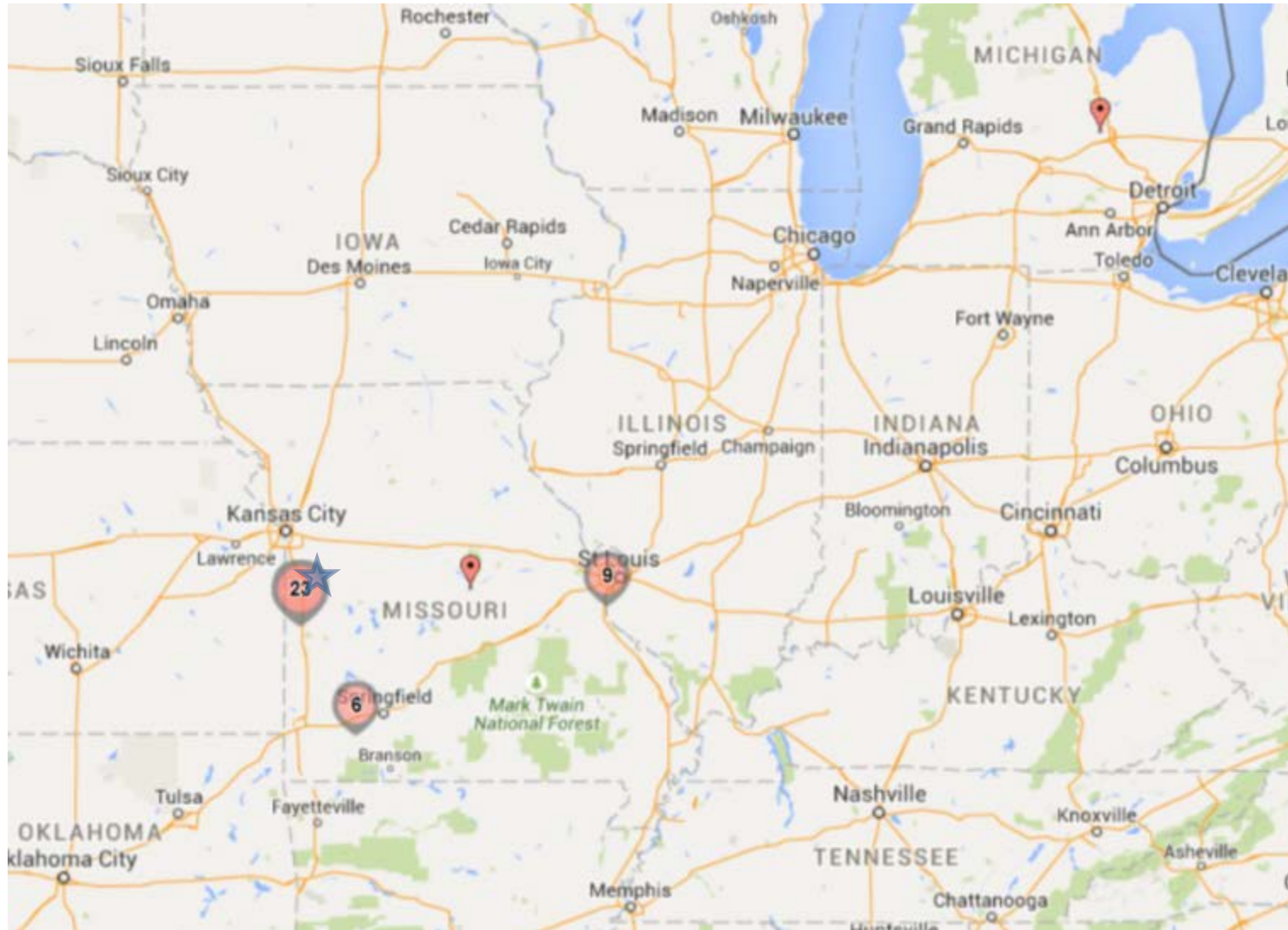
Table 3. Total number of responses categorized by each respondent's location.

State	Respondents	Percent
Missouri	35	90%
Illinois	2	5%
Kansas	1	2.5%
Michigan	1	2.5%
TOTAL	39	100%

Map of all respondent locations by ZIP code.

★ = Four Rivers Conservation Area

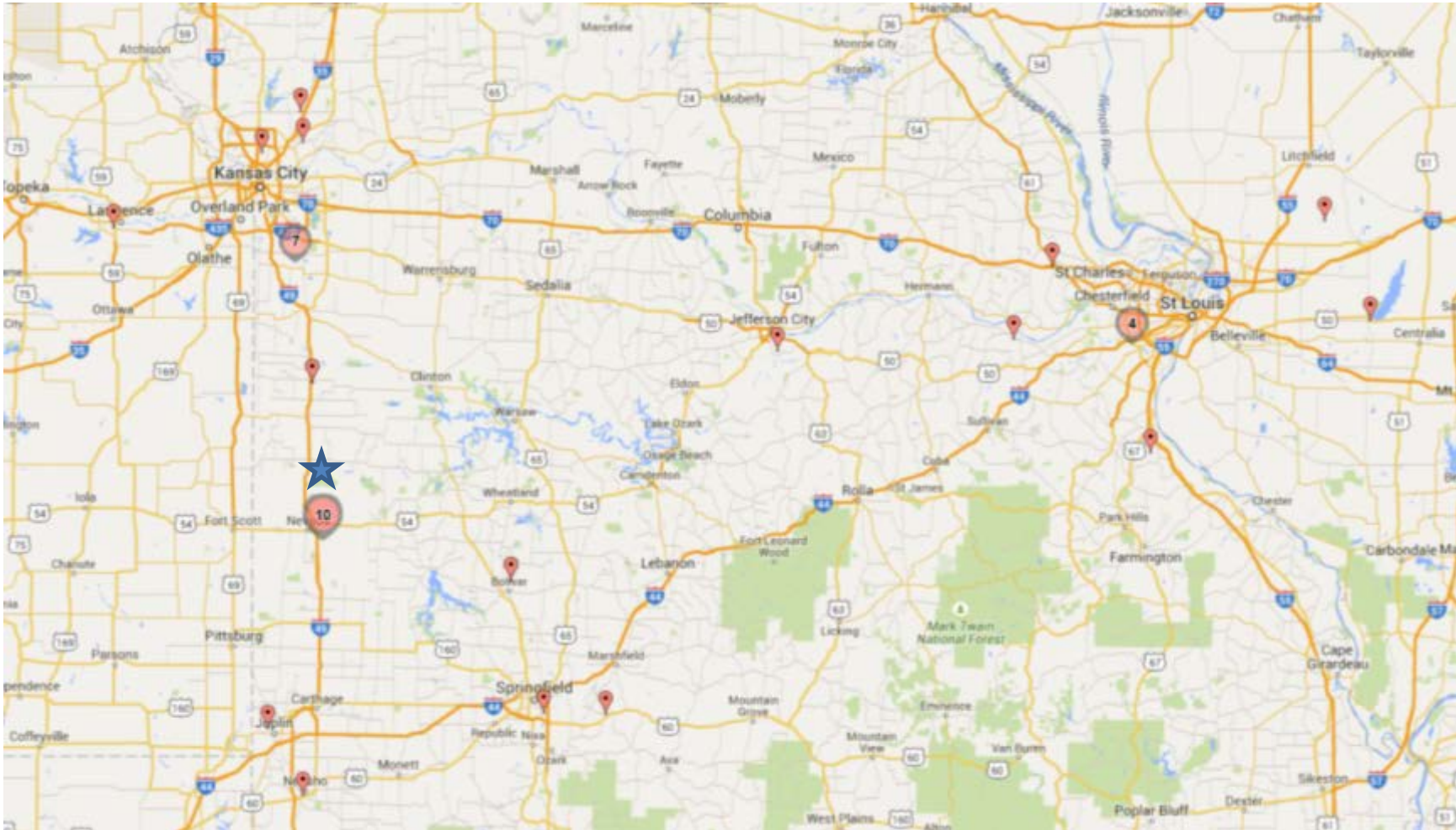
The pinpoints below represent the central point of ZIP codes from which a public comment was received (they do not represent actual street addresses). Shaded circles with numbers show multiple responses from a geographic area.



Map of Missouri respondent locations by ZIP code.

★ = Four Rivers Conservation Area

The pinpoints below represent the central point of ZIP codes from which a public comment was received (they do not represent actual street addresses). Shaded circles with numbers show multiple responses from a geographic area.



FOUR RIVERS OPEN HOUSE SUMMARY

Four Rivers Conservation Area Open House

Tuesday, June 9 (6:00-8:00 p.m.)

Four Rivers Headquarters

- 27 attendees
- 11 comments submitted
- 2 organizations represented (as indicated on comment sheets)
 - Ducks Unlimited, Marmaton Valley Chapter
 - Riverside Duck Club

Map of open house attendee locations by ZIP code. ★ = Four Rivers Conservation Area

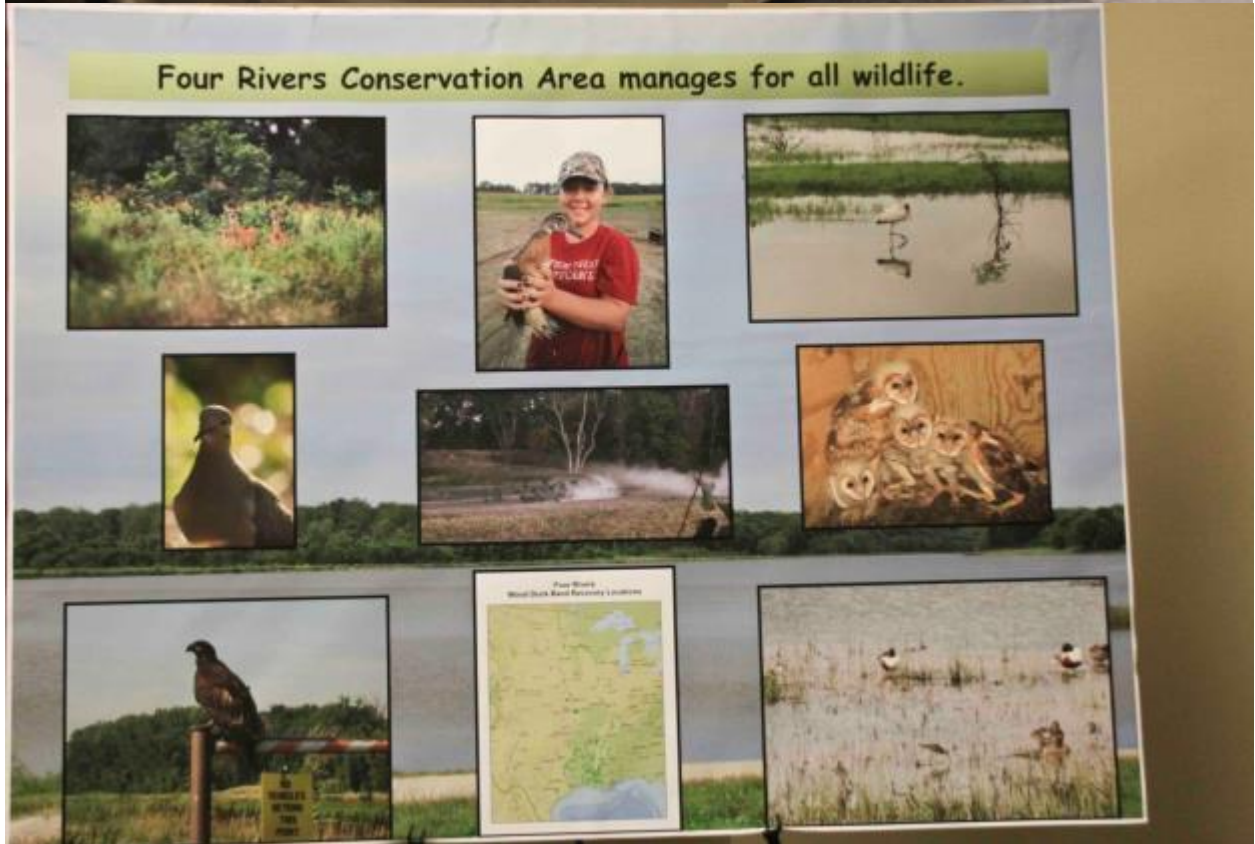
The pinpoints below represent the central point of ZIP codes from which a public comment was received (they do not represent actual street addresses). Shaded circles with numbers show multiple responses from a geographic area.

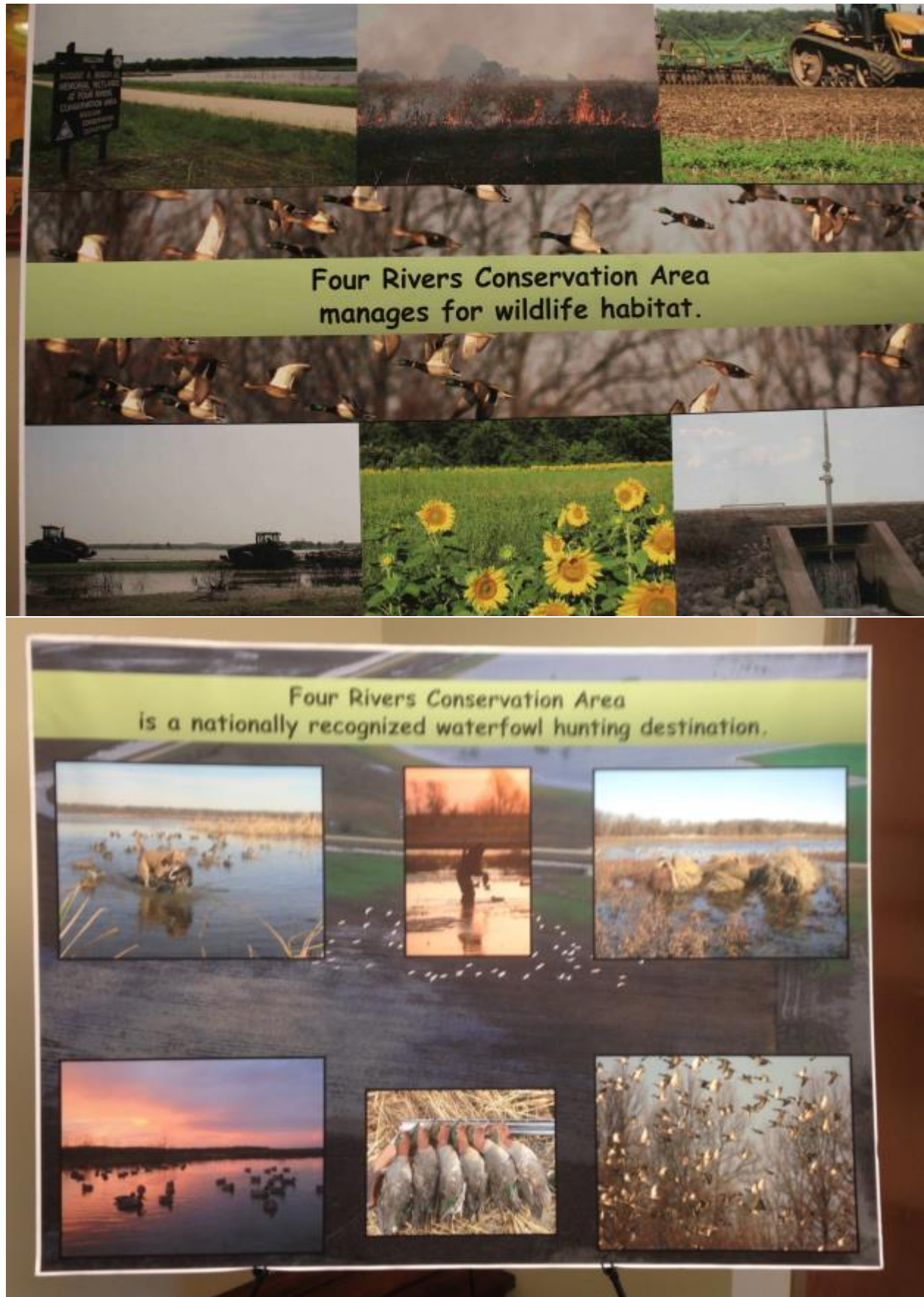


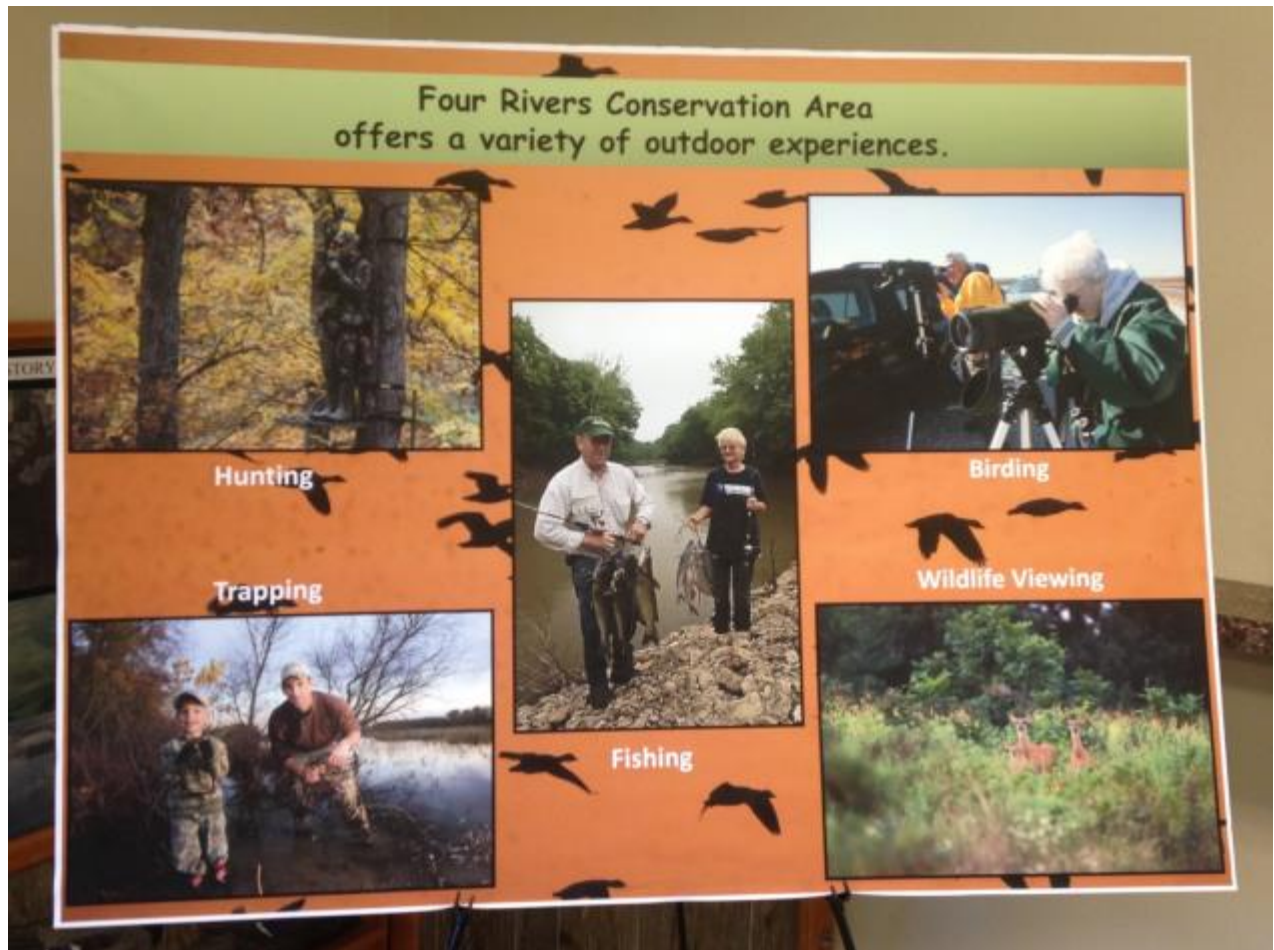
Photos of Four Rivers Open House











THEMES AND ISSUES IDENTIFIED THROUGH FOUR RIVERS CONSERVATION AREA IDEA GATHERING PHASE (May 1-June 15, 2015)

The Four Rivers Conservation Area Idea Gathering Stage was available for a public idea gathering period May 1-June 15, 2015. The Missouri Department of Conservation received 43 comments from 39 respondents. A brief summary of public input themes can be found below. The area planning team will take comments into consideration as they draft a 10-year management plan for Four Rivers Conservation Area. The draft area management plan will be available online (likely fall 2015) for a month-long comment period at mdc.mo.gov/areaplans. After that comment period, the plan will be finalized, and the final plan posted online.

Terrestrial/Aquatic Resource Management

- Suggests developing a pump system for Units 3 and 4.
- Suggests limiting crops to no more than 20 percent of reserve area. Concern with crops on refuge area attracting waterfowl and keeping them from migrating to neighboring properties.
- Suggests smaller blocks of corn; more milo, millet in hunting areas.
- Suggests managing equally for waterfowl and non-game wetland birds. Suggests managing for mudflats in spring for shorebirds. Suggests managing pools of cattails and other marsh vegetation to benefit wetland birds.
- Suggests mowing strips in South Unit 3 to promote clover growth.
- Suggests flooding small amount of refuge for early teal season.
- Suggests providing more food for ducks on area.
- Supports management that would increase deer and turkey populations on area.
- Suggests increased weed control.
- Suggests returning to areal seeding.
- Suggests planting native grasslands in upland areas.
- Supports high quality moist soil habitat as primary method to provide quality habitat for migratory waterfowl.
- Supports current level of waterfowl refuge.
- Suggests providing more natural cover in draw areas for blinds.
- Supports maintaining flood protection levee around Unit 3 to protect bottomland timber.

Public Use Management

Waterfowl Hunting

- Opposes quick draw method.
- Suggests allowing open (walk-in) waterfowl hunting in all units. Appreciates current option of open hunting in Units 3 and 4.
- Suggests developing more green timber hunting opportunities.
- Suggests adding/allowing (?) hunting blinds on Unit 1.
- Suggests greater enforcement of waterfowl hunter boat horsepower limits (especially in Unit 4). Suggests not allowing motorized boats in Unit 4 during waterfowl season.
- Suggests requiring drawing to limit number of hunters in Units 3 and 4.
- Suggests allowing hunting in reserve area by drawing (every four days and must leave by mid-morning).
- Suggests increasing out-of-state waterfowl license prices.
- Opposes use of robotic decoys.
- Suggests closing waterfowl hunting at 1:00 p.m. for first half of season; allow all-day hunting second half of season. Suggests closing waterfowl hunting at 1:00 p.m. for Units 1, 2, 3, and 4.
- Appreciates all-day waterfowl hunting opportunity. Suggests 11:00 am drawing for afternoon-only hunting.
- Suggests adding a youth-only waterfowl hunting area on weekends.

Boat Ramp/Deer Hunting

- Suggests opening boat ramp and road to deer hunters when not used for pumping. Suggests providing a boat ramp that is accessible year round.
- Allow archery deer hunting in waterfowl hunting only areas before and after duck season.
- Supports keeping archery only areas.
- Suggests allowing traditional gear only (recurve, longbow, selfbow) archery hunting in Units 1 and 2 from October 15-November 30.

Trails

- Suggests adding a trail system for hikers, bikers, and anglers.

Roads

- Concern with visitors not observing speed limits on area roads.

Administrative Considerations

- Appreciates Four Rivers Conservation Area and local staff.
- Provide access to Horton Bottoms Natural Area. Suggests building boat ramp east of I-49 service road on Little Osage River to provide access to Horton Bottoms.
- Suggests adding more drop boxes for self-check waterfowl hunting cards.
- Suggests sending survey to every waterfowl hunter that hunts this area.
- Suggests area manager meet with local landowners once a year to help develop landowner management plans.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Four Rivers Conservation Area Open House Flyer

SHARE YOUR Comments

How are conservation areas important to you?

The Missouri Department of Conservation is updating management plans for our almost 1,000 conservation areas and we want your comments.

Open House for public input on the Four Rivers Conservation Area

**Tuesday, June 9 from 6-8 p.m.
Four Rivers Conservation Area
Headquarters
4347 S 1625 Road, Rich Hill**

MDC is inviting public comment regarding the Four Rivers Conservation Area in Vernon and Bates Counties to aid staff in developing a 10-year management plan for the area. Interested persons or groups—including recreational users, neighboring landowners, conservation groups, elected officials and government agencies—are invited to offer input during the Open House, or online from now until mid-June at the website listed below.

Comment period closes

June 15, 2015



Take a look at management plans and share your comments online at **mdc.mo.gov/areaplans**, or get a copy of plans and comment forms at your local MDC office.

Appendix 2. Four Rivers Conservation Area Info Sheet

Share your ideas about Four Rivers Conservation Area

Staff at the Four Rivers Conservation Area are beginning to develop an area management plan for the next 10 years. We welcome your comments!



This 13,929 acre conservation area is largely wetlands with several large tracks of bottomland forest in Vernon and Bates Counties, northeast of Nevada.

It is one of nearly 1,000 conservation areas owned or managed by the Missouri Department of Conservation. Conservation areas support the Department's mission by offering places to restore and conserve fish, forest, and wildlife resources, and providing opportunity for all citizens to use, enjoy, and learn about these resources. Conservation areas are different than state or local parks that may place a greater emphasis on team sports, recreational activities, or social gatherings.

What's a Conservation Area Management Plan?

These plans document strategies for natural resource management and public use on conservation areas. Conservation area plans also help communicate an area's purpose and management direction to staff and interested citizens. Area management plans serve as a management plan for the property with a focus on terrestrial and aquatic resource management, public use management, and administrative considerations. Missouri Department of Conservation staff will begin drafting the 10-year Four Rivers Area Management Plan later this year, which will be available for an additional public comment period in coming months.

Why do you want my ideas now?

This spring, we are working to gather ideas to help inform us when developing our draft area management plan. We would love to hear from visitors who care about and use the Four Rivers Conservation Area.

An Open House for public input will be held Tuesday, June 9 from 6-8 p.m. at the Four Rivers Conservation Area Headquarters, 4347 S 1625 Road, Rich Hill.

Questions? Contact Amy Buechler, amy.buechler@mdc.mo.gov, 573-522-4115 x3252.

Comment online at mdc.mo.gov/areaplans or mail comments to: Amy Buechler, MDC, Policy Coordination, P.O. Box 180, Jefferson City, MO 65102. Comment period closes June 15.

Appendix 3. Four Rivers Open House Press Release

MDC welcomes public input on Four Rivers area plan

Open house slated June 9 for August A. Busch, Jr. Memorial Wetlands at Four Rivers



Waterfowl and shorebirds mingled this spring at MDC's August A. Busch, Jr. Memorial Wetlands at Four Rivers Conservation Area.

Photo by Chris Daniel, Missouri Department of Conservation

Nevada, Mo. – The Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC) wants to know your suggestions for the August A. Busch, Jr. Memorial Wetlands at Four Rivers Conservation Area in Vernon and Bates counties. MDC is in the multi-year process of updating management plans for almost 1,000 conservation areas throughout the state and invites public comments.

MDC is inviting public comment at the Four Rivers Conservation Area to aid staff in developing a 10-year management plan for the area. Interested persons or groups are invited to bring their ideas to an open house 6 to 8 p.m. on Tuesday, June 9, at the Four Rivers office, 4347 W. 1625 Road, Rich Hill, Mo. MDC welcomes input on the plan from recreational users, neighboring landowners, conservation groups, elected officials and government agencies.

The public is welcome to share ideas, compliments or improvement suggestions with MDC staff at the open house. Staff will answer questions about management practices at Four Rivers or about conservation in general. Visitors will also be able to fill out comment sheets. More information about

the open house is available by calling 417-876-5226.

The public is also invited to share ideas online now through June 15 at mdc.mo.gov/areaplans.

Four Rivers is a premier wetland and bottomland forest destination for hunters, birders, hikers, photographers and naturalists. The Marmaton River, Little Osage River, Marais des Cygnes River and Osage River all run through or border the almost 14,000-acre area. Four Rivers has four major wetland units and is designated an Important Bird Area by Audubon Missouri. The area includes the Horton Bottoms Natural Area. A boardwalk in Unit 3 adjacent to the Ducks Unlimited Presidents Marsh provides easy access to view emergent vegetation and wildlife.

Statewide, MDC conservation areas cover almost one million public acres for the purpose of restoring and conserving forest, fish and wildlife resources, and for providing opportunities for all citizens to use, enjoy and learn about these resources. Most Missourians are within a 30-minute drive of an MDC conservation area.

“Missourians care about conservation and use conservation areas for many different reasons,” said MDC Director Bob Ziehmer. “These areas help people discover nature through various activities, and help make Missouri a great place to hunt, fish, and enjoy other outdoor activities. We want to know how conservation areas are important to Missourians. Encouraging public comments on Conservation Area Management Plans is part of MDC’s ongoing efforts of working for and with Missourians to sustain healthy forests, fish and wildlife.”

Conservation Area Management Plans focus on natural resource management and public use on conservation areas. The plans do not address regulations on hunting, fishing and other area uses, which are set by the Conservation Commission and enforced under the Wildlife Code of Missouri. MDC will consider all ideas received and will work to balance the issues and interests identified with the responsibility of managing areas for the present and future benefits to forest, fish, wildlife, and people. Decisions on which ideas to incorporate into area plans and on how to best incorporate them will be based on the property’s purpose, its physical and biological conditions and capabilities, the best roles of the property in its local, regional and state-wide context, and on the professional expertise of MDC staff.

Appendix 4. Four Rivers Conservation Area Open House Comment Form

SHARE YOUR *Comments*

How is the Four Rivers Conservation Area important to you?

Personal Information

Name: _____

Organization (if any): _____

E-mail: _____

☐ Yes, I want to receive e-mail updates about the Four Rivers Area Plan.

☐ Yes, I want to receive e-mail updates about other conservation area plans.

Zip code: _____



Your ideas

Staff at the Four Rivers Conservation Area are beginning to develop an area management plan for the next 10 years. To help inform this effort, we welcome your ideas about the management of Four Rivers Conservation Area!

(Continued on back)

Appendix 5. Comments received at Four Rivers Conservation Area Open House (June 9, 2015)

Go to open waterfowl hunting in all wetland units. Do away with the draw system of hunting allocation. I believe hunters will regulate themselves as we do in Unit 4.
As a non land owner 4 Rivers is to my family like our outdoor home most of my children's outdoor firsts have happened here. We love this area and the staff in the area are top notch and answer my questions to the best of their ability. Thanks for all you do.
Food in reserve aera should be limited too twenty percent profagate food corn, millet, milo or beans. Open access to reserve for acurent county food in hunting aeras of any kind all of the above corn ect. If duck feed is let in reserve aera hunter should be allowed to draw in on a every 3rd day no more than one part of 4 or less on eighty acres and must be out of aera by 10:30 AM
Get access to Horton Bottom area. Access to river for canoeing to hunt. Open ramp and road to hunters (deer hunters) when not pumping. Mow strips (little levees) in South Unit 3-promote clover growth. Access to road to boat ramp to bow hunt Unit 3. Access to Unit 2 (edges to S and E for bowhunting). Keep enough water in Unit 3 South to boat back to levee for access to SE Unit 3. Continue to plant crops in Unit 3 South side. Keep archery only areas (archery only except medical crossbows). Please add a boat ramp 365 day access!
You do a great job in our view. We hunt the Orad Moore property and we are very pleased with the improvements you have made.
This past year Shell and 4 Rivers have held a lot of ducks, but they don't seem to move during the day. They come out at night to feed on our places. Thus our hunting has suffered. I know other clubs expressed similar issues. Thanks.
No Quick Draw, Ever! I personally believe quickdraw takes away from hunting because it forces more people to be technology oriented. I sincerely hope to never see the quickdraw at Four Rivers Conservation Area. Increase out of state waterfowl licenses prices. The conservation could have more funding for projects and improvements. Eliminate the use of Robo Decoys! I think the Mojo and Robo ducks have ruined waterfowling; the use of Robotic decoys has made the ducks very shy of call and decoy. I also want to see some sort of rule implemented for SKYBLASTERS! It is so aggravating to see people shoot ducks tall whenever you are trying to park them in the decoys. The number of people shooting ducks high, is going up and we need to get back to shooting ducks over decoys. ITS NOT DOVE HUNTING.
I would like to see a small amount of the refuge flooded for early teal season like years past. While corn is a great food source for ducks, I would like to see the blocks of corn broken down into smaller sizes. More milo patches would be nice for those that hunt out of layout boats. No quick draw or any kind of hybrid method of allocating the morning draw is needed for Four Rivers. Overall, I am very pleased with the management of Four Rivers. I feel Chris Daniel and the area staff do a good job, both managing for ducks and hunters. Having Unit 3 and Unit 4 as an option for open hunting really makes the area well rounded.

Do not change the draw process currently in place! No quick draw! Plant a few strips of milo/sorghum in pools to provide better cover for walk in hunters and layout boats. Corn and moist soil are good but in wet years and dry years the corn does not provide the best cover or food for birds. Hunt where your boats are. Too many guys uses big boats as "taxi cabs" to haul their layout boats to the marsh and they park the big boat in areas that could be occupied by other hunters. Park it on the levy or hunt next to it! Chris Daniel and his staff do a terrific job managing Four Rivers. I have had many quality hunts over the years here and I attribute much of it to their love of managing the area for hunters.

Thank you for the opportunity to visit with everyone. I would like to receive information about the area management plan and vision for the area if expansion is planned.

Our family utilizes the 4 Rivers Conservation Area for recreational use. We love coming here, but would like to see more feed for the ducks. I strongly believe in utilizing the water supply better - no water - no waterfowl.

Appendix 6. Comments received during Four Rivers Conservation Area Idea Gathering Phase (May 1-June 15, 2015).

<p>I am a wildlife photographer and visited this refuge in late Summer. I plan to return in the fall. I love the ability to drive at my own pace and stop when I spot wildlife / birds. One of my favorite CA's in MO. I wish there were more like it. I also wish more visitors would observe the speed limit.</p>
<p>I would love to see equal management for both waterfowl and other non-game wetland birds. It would be great in the spring to have a focus on manipulating the pool levels for mudflats for shorebirds and have non-game species a priority as well as waterfowl hunting opportunities.</p>
<p>I have been a moderate to heavy user of Four Rivers for about 15 years and I feel like this area is well managed and has led to many successful hunts over many years. I think the current set up and opportunities for wade and shoot hunters is good. I have hunted both the draw areas and the open areas and I have a couple of ideas that I believe would add to the area without taking away from its many current successes.</p> <p>1) Develop more open area green timber hunting opportunities(not included in the morning drawing) in the Horton Bottom area to expand duck hunting options for open area users.</p> <p>2) Do not expand quick-draw to Four Rivers as I believe it will weaken the usage of the area due to the lack of draw success and drive users to other facilities possibly in other states, i.e. Neosho Wildlife Area. As many hunters are aware area usage is weather and bird dependant, sometimes last minute decisions to go hunt develop quickly as the weather changes and if you haven't put in for the draw online you most likely will not get to hunt a draw area picking from the poor line.</p> <p>3) Is it possible to develop a pump system for unit 3 and 4 so that hunters do not have to rely on late season floods to fill those areas?</p> <p>4) In the first 1/2 of the season, typically the first 30 days, shut down hunting at 1pm in the draw areas to lessen hunting pressure on the birds, and then allow all day hunting the last 30 days of season as this is typically better timed with our more numerous pushes of birds</p> <p>5) Develop better field hunting opportunities in the area surrounding four rivers to allow feed hunting opportunities in corn. Perhaps these fields could be part of the morning draw system.</p>
<p>It would be nice to have a pump station on Unit #4 and not have to rely on the river getting high enough to flood the area. Also, a few blinds on Unit #1 would level the playing field for those without layout boats.</p>
<p>Open the boat ramp when not in use pumping out of the river.</p> <p>Open river access year round this would allow canoe access to the south side of little osage (horton bottoms) when water is at normal pool (to low to run river from other access points).</p>

Open the drive to the boat ramp to Hunters only (not just duck hunters only)- most of the unwanted traffic by the duck marshes are nature watchers not bow hunters driving back and forth. Bow hunters are in the woods hunting morning and evening when duck hunting is at its best.

Open duck hunting only areas to bow hunting when duck season is closed- we loose access for 15 days prior to duck season and 15 days after duck season instead of just duck season.

The duck hunting is good and the pools and crops are kept up nicely due to a lot of hard work by the conservation team- we hunters solute you! Most of us hunt more than just ducks, we don't want to hinder the duck hunting just utilize the resources when not in use.

Leave boat ramp open when not pumping water- opens access to the land locked Horton bottoms.

Allow river access for canoes to be carried to the river even while pumping- opens access to the land locked Horton bottoms. Unless rain water has filled the river enough to get past the riffle to the south you can't boat to the horton bottoms and most of the time the ramp is silted in too much to use 10 miles to the south. Horton bottoms are 3 miles deep with only I-49 highway access for a 1/4 mile.

Open drive to boat ramp to all hunters not just duck hunters. This was closed due to the fear of disturbing the ducks- however after walking over a mile to sit 100yds off the road I watch duck hunters drive in and out for breakfast, lunch, bathroom breaks, etc. Bow hunters drive in in the dark, out for lunch and back for evening then out at dark- a lot less traffic- allows shorter access to carry a deer out.

Open duck hunting areas to bow hunting when duck season is closed- the area remains closed even when duck season is closed- this allows better access to land locked ground by the refuge.

I am a duck hunter and a bow hunter, our states resources should be shared between the sports.

Since this is PUBLIC land, I would like to see it open for ALL and not just the "special" duck hunters. My money goes to support this land and I do NOT hunt ducks.

I would like to see the following:

1. When duck season is NOT open, allow archery hunting in these areas.
2. Leave the drive to the river access OPEN to ALL hunters, not just duck hunters.
3. Leave the river access OPEN year around.
4. Leave the boat ramp open when not in use by the pumps.

Thanks

Much of the area is inaccessible. A trail system would allow more access to a broader range of users over much of the year. The trail system would allow for hikers, bikers, and fisherman to enjoy much of the area that is normally only accessible by boat during the waterfowl season.

More drop boxes for self check waterfowl cards as sometimes you have to drive miles out of the way to pick up and drop of cards when hunting some of the open areas.

The addition of pumping capabilities for unit 4 would be helpful for better controlling water levels.

Wonderful area as far as overall managed habitat and location in a historically important flyway for waterfowl. Obviously other species benefit greatly from this area and people of many backgrounds and interests use this area. I use it as a waterfowler. I would think that with the amount of investment that is already in this area, a pumping station for Unit 4 would be something most all would appreciate and want to see. Seems we waterfowlers find ourselves relying on a high river every fall for a place to hunt in Units 3 and 4. It's an awfully nice area to be left dry in low river years. We spent the money to acquire it and develop it, let's finish the job and give it the tools to flood it without relying on natural fall flooding.

I would love to see Unit 1 transitioned and managed for traditional waterfowl blinds like Schell-Osage. You'd still have units 2, 3 and 4 available for opportunistic hunting from layouts, etc. I know many, many people that won't use Four Rivers for this reason. Age (young and old), Ability or simply lack of desire to hunt in an "open" unit setting turns them away. Particularly if Schell ends up being "idled" for a period of time while it undergoes its own renovation. Waterfowlers as a group are aging. I realize the average age of a Four Rivers waterfowler goes against this statement but it's a fact of our sport. Give older, (many times wiser!) waterfowlers a chance to enjoy Four Rivers while still leaving plenty of room available for those that enjoy the freedom of open unit hunting. We might even find a mentor or two in those ranks to pass along some valuable lessons within our sport!

Flooded Timber - Four Rivers is blessed with owning one of the largest contiguous tracts of hardwood bottomland forest remaining in the Osage River Basin. Is there a way to develop the southern portions of the complex to capture floodwater behind some smaller levees?

Designate some hunting holes via daily drawing? I was fortunate to enjoy A-Pool at Schell-Osage dating back to 1975. Ask anyone who was blessed enough to hunt that habitat in its prime and they will tell you it is truly one of, if not THE biggest losses for waterfowlers in your portion of the State. You hold the habitat in its virgin form and I'd love to see some studies performed to see if it is feasible to give Missouri waterfowlers a true green timber habitat. 40 acres here or there around the State is great, but Four Rivers possesses hundreds of acres in contiguous form. I have 4 youth hunters who have no idea what that green timber experience was like. What a gift that would be to our next generation of waterfowl hunters!

In summary:

Awesome area, well-managed in its current form given its limitations.

Help the area and its staff become more self-sufficient for flooding habitat.

Help the area better utilize its diverse forms of its habitat to their potential.

Put the tools in place for more hunting methods so the area can be better utilized.

I'm a deer & turkey hunter vs water fowl, so interested in actions that would enhance deer and turkey populations...

I truly appreciate the area and have hunted it for over 20 years. I appreciate the effort and work that is put in every year. I would think that it would be more effective if the MDC would send surveys to hunters that have hundreds of use hours on the area every year. I spend countless hours fishing, hunting, and scouting the area. This could be achieved through the conservation numbers that have to be submitted before every hunt. I know that I have a strong connection and most hunters of this area also have this bond. I'll be honest, I don't believe that my opinion really matters in most of the decisions that occur on this or any public land in Missouri. I have sent many letters to managers in my life and my opinion really never was considered. I believe that is the greatest problem that the MDC has. The disconnect between the citizens of the state and the Department higher ups. I have had great interactions with managers and their staff in my life, but with most organizations, there is a disconnect between the bosses in Jefferson City and those that are on the area. There have been countless meetings to discuss different issues in the last year, catfish size limits, deer regulations, quick draw, etc... and none of these ideas changed with public pressure from the original stance made by the MDC. Even if it was met by immense negative pressure. This leads me to when upper MDC management makes a decision, it will be shoved down our throats whether we like it or not. So I will not have any opinions about 4 Rivers. It will be whatever it is.

I would like to see more enforcement of the horsepower limits on the area...especially in Unit 4. The large horsepower mud motors roaring up and down the marsh constantly makes for a dangerous situation and disturbs the waterfowl using the area. I've seen boats traveling at 30+ mph buzz by small layout boats and wading hunters posing a serious danger to them. Many of these high horsepower boats are just out to joyride around the marsh, jump the levees, and just disrupt the whole area without doing much of any hunting.

This is a wetland management area and 2 areas are dependent on seasonal rain flooding. Why not have these areas, specifically unit #3, #4 be controlled or tied into the pumping facility in unit #2. This would allow the area staff to manage water levels that the MDC would like to maintain. This as well would allow better area wetland management for migratory birds, enhance hunting opportunities, and area management control.

Email to Bill Graham

Mr. Graham,

Since I will not be able to express myself in person, I thought I would shoot you a note regarding my thoughts on the 4 Rivers CA. If you are not the right person, please accept my

apologies and forward to the correct channel.

I am an avid duck hunter and have been a licensed hunter/duck stamp buyer/member of DU for over 35 years, 25 years in Butler and Vernon County areas.

It is my understanding that, not only 4 RCA, but all/most of the MO CA's have an extensive budget planting corn, beans and milo in the CA's refuge areas and while this attracts many migratory birds, it holds them from migrating to other area private hunting areas. As an owner and lessee of some of these private areas, this practice has largely effected my ability to effectively control the migratory bird population.

Given the State's budget toward conservation, I wonder if this wouldn't be a win/win for both the local hunters as well as the States financial condition, if a less costly grain could be planted instead, forcing the migratory birds to travel off of the refuge in search preferred food sources? The birds learn quickly where they are safe and will travel back to the refuges once they have hit their food source.

These are just my thoughts/opinions for not only 4RCA, but for All MOCA's that provide these food/refuge sources. I am interested to hear the feedback you get on the 9th of June. Please let me know where I can follow up.

Thank you for hearing me out.

Recommend limiting waterfowl hunter daily use numbers in Units 3 and 4 by implementing a drawing or other method to limit hunters for those units.

2. Or, impose a 1:00 closure for waterfowl hunting in Units 3 and 4.

3. Recommend a 1:00 closure for Units 1 and 2.

4. Oppose increasing the number of hunting parties put into Pool 6 from 3 to 4.

5. Implement water control structures (dams/levees/gate structures) in Pool 15 to create smaller and shallower impoundments.

6. Implement water control and pumping capabilities at Settles Ford CA to increase reliable huntable acreage to offset hunter use days at Four Rivers CA.

2nd Submission:

With regard to waterfowl hunting opportunities: I certainly hope this area, specifically Units 1 & 2, remain outside of the reach of "Quick Draw". Overcrowding at this area is not an issue of the magnitude that Grand Pass, Eagle Bluffs and Otter Slough suffered prior to Quick Draw being instituted. I am of the opinion that Quick Draw is unnecessary at the Four Rivers complex. I for one would not utilize Four Rivers if it falls under the Quick Draw system. I've talked to numerous hunters that now utilize Four Rivers due to being statistically pushed out of

the draws at Grand Pass and Eagle Bluffs so I think we can all agree the re-distribution of usage on some of the less-utilized areas has been accomplished. Please leave Four Rivers out of Quick Draw and allow hunters to continue to enjoy hunting opportunities at that complex.

Currently, 4 Rivers has the capability of managing water levels via Pumping or Reservoir systems for Unit's 1 and 2. There are no resources currently available to manage water levels in Unit 3 and 4 without the help of Mother Nature and late season rainfall in August, September, October.

MDC needs to develop and implement a system to utilize the Pumping Station in Unit #2 by Pool 6 to allow for the water management of both Unit #3 and #4. It is my understanding that a plan was previously developed by a retired Area Manager to address this issue. It's a travesty that a Wetland Area like 4 Rivers cannot adequately and professionally manage the water levels to ensure hunting opportunities across the 4 Units that are managed for Waterfowl.

This area has an excellent Staff and they need the resources and water management capabilities to make it a Premier Hunting Area and Waterfowl Refuge and Holding area. Take the time to develop a comprehensive plan that doesn't exclusively depend on Mother Nature's rath. This will greatly increase hunting opportunities and maybe help with hunter recruitment on the Western side of the State. I envision a time where the Reservation System and Quick Check System are eliminated due to the fact that MDC has consciously and expertly enhanced and expanded waterfowl hunting opportunities. Chris, Doug, Eric, and Ray of the Area Staff are outstanding individuals please empower them to have the tools and resources available to properly manage this area and the associated water/pool levels. A lot has been done at 4 Rivers, now just finish the JOB! Make it a priority. I am tired of reading about he money spent on Ten Mile Pond - an area that cannot effectively hold water without excessive cost and pumping stations. Put the money into areas that can manage, maintain, and control water levels.

The same issue holds true for Montrose and Settles Ford. Come up with a Plan for each of these areas that provides water management and control systems that properly allow for additional hunting opportunities and rest areas for waterfowl migration. Take the time and make the effort to resolve the local issues that prevent these areas from managing water levels.

I think that Four Rivers is extremely well managed. We own 920 acres of a WRP tract in Vernon Co between Four Rivers and the Kansas line and so trade ducks with Four Rivers. The management of Four Rivers is very important to us. Chris Daniel has helped us through the years with local information on how to manage the WRP tract. He has a knack of making complicated issues easy to understand and to implement.

To fix a problem, one must first identify it. Private landowners like myself without the land management educational background can have a problem and not know it. I think it would be beneficial to Four Rivers and all the surrounding areas if we could get someone with local knowledge like Chris to visit at least once a year to help us with our management plans. I'm aware that we have an office in Warrensburg for this purpose; but they admit that there is no substitute for local knowledge.

In my opinion, the sharing of that knowledge and experience with landowners and duck clubs could improve the quality of hunting all the way from Kansas to Truman Lake. The help I have received from the staff of Four Rivers has helped immensely in the development and improvement of our land.

Your whole operation at Four Rivers is the best! The staff is excellent; knowledgeable, very friendly, and very helpful. Calling from out-of-state to plan a duck hunting trip, all staff were excellent, Chris especially. When we got there (never having hunted there before) the unit was very user-friendly, clearly and functionally laid out, maps were accurate, it was well-flooded and planted, and the staff descriptions of conditions and what to expect were accurate to a "T". All these factors enabled us to have excellent duck hunts most of the days we were there. Your managed areas are the finest I've ever seen, well maintained, well farmed, huge launches, top-notch farming/crops, and lots of ducks, which is their endorsement of excellence, as they come in droves, and stick around as they love what you're doing there. I've also hunted Nodaway, and Bob Brown, and found them to be excellent as well. Pat yourselves all on the back for a job well done! All of you folks from MDC that were involved with the original planning, the management, and any other of the operations of this very fine gem known as Four Rivers should be very proud of yourselves in the creating and running of the very finest example of what managed waterfowl hunting can and should be.

Weed control. Last season much of pool 16 was infested with cockleburrs making access into parts impossible

Keep things like they are especially the walk in areas. Go back to areal seeding. And you have hit a home run

To whom it may concern:

I like the current regulations and rules at Four Rivers C.A. regarding waterfowl. The current plan of having Units#1 and Units#2 being draw only units very well suits the public, and the area. Having Units #3 and Units#4 walk-in areas allows many opportunities for hunters that do not prefer the draw, or are not that morning to still make use of the area. On a side note, I personally would rather hunt the open areas than participate in the morning draw system. My hat is off to the staff at Four Rivers for making the area an exceptional area for waterfowl hunting.

I would like to see some changes in the Deer Hunting Regulations. The changes that I would like to see made changed, would allow the Archery Hunter more opportunities. The proposed change is to allow Archery hunting to stay open until November 30th on Units#1 and Units#2. I believe archery hunters should be allowed to access the timber north and east of pool #12 in Unit#2. If you are concerned about increased or an over abundance of hunters, narrow the market by making it "Traditional Gear Only" area. This would be recurve, longbow, selfbow. The changes could be Units#1 and Units#2 are "Traditional only" from Oct. 15th to Nov. 30th would allow more uses of the area.

If you have any questions regarding these proposed ideas, please feel free to contact me at any

time. I would love to hear your thoughts, pro's and con's!

Thank you,

The management, staff and policies at Four Rivers are fantastic, please don't make significant changes. The following are my suggestions, in order of importance:

1. Please do not implement Quick Draw. That program is the death of public hunting for avid waterfowlers.
2. Please add a daily tag drop box at Unit 2, this would eliminate the drive back to the shop from Unit 2 after hunting.
3. Suggest implementing a "youth only" pool on the weekends. This would be similar to Neosho Wildlife Area in Kansas...they have a specific pool that only parties with youth hunters are allowed to use on the weekend.

Great CA, please keep up the good work. I really enjoy the area. Thanks

I would like to see some type of pump system installed that would allow the staff to pump water into the open areas. Four Rivers has one of the last and best open areas for duck hunting in the midwest. I think it should remain an open area which allows duck hunters to pursue waterfowl without pulling a number out of a box or over the internet. Each time out I learn a little more about the area and it has made me a better waterfowl hunter.

I've hunted Four Rivers quite a lot over the last 25 years and always felt it is a well managed area. I know most of the areas in Missouri are on a 1:00 closure, but Four Rivers offers all day hunting in the draw units and that is very appealing to me and other hunters, as the hunting at Four Rivers is usually better in the afternoon. I have often thought even trying part or all of the draw units as an afternoon only hunting with something like a 11:00 am drawing would be a good idea and something completely different from all the other public areas.

I did attend the meeting 6-9 but did not have time to fill out my comments good meeting. My ideas start with NO quick draw for Four Rivers there are 2 walk in areas and rivers if you don't draw. No every member draws many times I prefer as do many people to hunt with 1 or 2 others or just myself and dog. Pool 14 could be a great addition if it had a more reliable water supply it only has water every 5 yrs or so but when it does its great at times would almost double the size of unit 3 hunting water. More river ramps to take advantage of both hunting and fishing. The area mgrs. at both Schell and 4 rivers do a great job and their staff as well. More planting of millet or other moist soil would help both Units 3 and 4. Also a way to access all the pools of unit 4 by boat other than pulling over levee would help. Thank you for having a open meeting talked with some people that really seemed to care about what I had to say

E-mail sent to Chris Daniel (June 10, 2015 7:48 AM): Although I fully appreciate that much of the acquisition of land was for providing waterfowl hunting opportunities, the vast majority of species that use this area are non-game species and a number of them are considered species of

Special Concern or even Threatened at both the state and federal level. These include a number of species that utilize emergent marsh vegetation, such as cattails, for breeding. In particular, if sizable pools of cattails and other marsh vegetation were part of the management program the following avian species were benefit: Least and American bitterns, King Rail (a species that is being considerable for federal listing), Black Rail (shallow, moist soil units with grasses, sedges, rushes), both Sora and Virginia rails, Northern Harrier, Short-eared Owl, Marsh Wren and Yellow-headed Blackbird. Of course, that is just the avian marsh component.

In addition, given that most of the wetlands have been lost across North America there now is very little habitat available for migrating shorebirds that use such sites for refueling and resting on their way to arctic breeding grounds. Western Missouri is within the main flyway for such vulnerable species as Hudsonian Godwit (spring only) and Stilt Sandpipers and the western population of the endangered Piping Plover. Moreover, > 25 species of shorebirds would use mudflats and shallow water with short stature vegetation from late March through May and again for southbound migration from July through September.

Finally, a number of grassland species (including Northern Bobwhite) could benefit from planting native grasslands in upland areas. Given how much of the midwest and Great Plains grasslands have been converted to cropland, Four Rivers could provide critical habitat for a number of grassland-inhabiting species at all times of the year.

Hard Copy-Although I enjoyed visiting with fellow hunters and MDC staff, I was disappointed in the format of the open house. The meeting would have been a great opportunity for staff to go over objectives of the area and discuss goals for the next 10 years. I think you missed a good chance to do so with a large group anyway, my thoughts. 1) The primary objective of the area should be to provide quality habitat for migratory waterfowl. Public use must come second. 2) High quality moist soil habitat should be the primary method to reach their objective. 3) The area should continue to provide the current level of waterfowl refuge during the fall, winter and spring. 4) I feel the quality of hunting in Unit 4 has been hurt by the use of go-devil type motors. I would like to see a portion of Unit 4 (in waterfowl hunting area) closed to all motorized boats during the waterfowl season. 5) The flood protection levee around Unit 3 should be maintained at current elevation to protect the bottomland timber in that unit. -Sorry for the poor writing - I'm traveling on rough highways!

Hard Copy-These offerings are an effort to increase hunting opportunities with minimum cost. I have marked up a few maps to facilitate.

Unit 3 Pool #14-If Pool #14 could be pumped it would expand opportunities in that unit. Most of pool #14 is slightly higher than #13. By pumping from the barrow ditch in #13 to #14 this goal may be achieved. See Map A.

Unit #1-Currently, a large tract of timbered land laying south and west of Pools #2,3, and 4 has very limited access. In the past I have hunted ducks in this area, south and north of the Little Osage River it provides excellent duck hunting after heavy rains or flooding. Private land owners gave permission to cross their property to gain access. Now, new land owners will not grant access. A new bridge for the east service road along I-49 has been constructed connecting

State Route "TT" and the town of Horton to the south. I believe the Department owns the land at this point east of the service road and south of the river. If a boat ramp could be constructed at this location it would provide access to this large area. No other disturbance or expense would be required. See Map B.

Thank you for your time.

Hard Copy-I continue to hunt at Four Rivers CA for waterfowl probably 10-20 days out of every season. I really like the walk in access in Unit 4, it allows me and my son to move around to different areas and hunt ducks in multiple locations. I hope this will continue to remain open. I do like the draw tags but this is a hassle for us to drive 1.5 hours to stand in line and hope we draw. The reservation system is nice, I am not a big fan of the quick draw because it gives you even a lower chance of drawing than the traditional system of standing in line. Items to improve: 1) Better crop management for waterfowl. 2) Provide more natural cover in draw areas for blinds. 3) Find consistent way to flood or control water in Unit 4 during dry years.

Map A (from comment on page 34)



Map B-1 (from comment on page 35)



Map B-2 (from comment on page 35)

